



**Crimethinc.
on Suicide &
Self-Destruction**



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In the era of precarity, this is clearer than ever. Globalization has swept the entire population of the planet into one labor pool that competes for the same jobs; mechanization is replacing those jobs, rendering us more and more disposable. In this context, those who set out merely to defend their positions in the economy are doomed. Look at the student movement of 2009-2010, or the protests in Wisconsin last spring: these rearguard struggles to preserve the privileges of a particular demographic could only fail. Today we can neither found our strategy on incremental victories—we are in no more of a position to win them than our rulers are to grant them—nor on the fixed roles that once gave the general strike its force. We have to fight from our shared vulnerability: not on the basis of what we are, but of what we will not be.

The only thing that can bind us in this is our willingness to renounce, to defect, to fight—to abolish the system that created us. This means altering our lives beyond recognition. There are no guarantees in this undertaking; it takes self-destructive abandon. We must not celebrate this, but there is no getting around it.

Nothing is more terrifying than departing from what we know. It may take more courage to do this without killing oneself than it does to light oneself on fire. Such courage is easier to find in company; there is so much we can do together that we cannot do as individuals. If he had been able to participate in a powerful social movement, perhaps Bouazizi would never have committed suicide; but paradoxically, for such a thing to be possible, each of us has to take a step analogous to the one he took into the void.

We cannot imagine what Bouazizi went through, nor the hundreds upon hundreds of others who have lost their lives in the struggles throughout North Africa since—only a minute fraction of the casualties of capitalism this past year. Yet in embracing destruction on his own terms, he at least opened a path to something else. When a youngster hoods up for a black bloc or a middle-aged secretary moves into an encampment, departing from all they know, all they have been, they can hope to do the same.

Let's make our despair into a transformative force. Perhaps we can give a positive meaning to the saying that is so chilling in reference to the gift Mohamed Bouazizi gave us: you have to be ready to die to be ready to live.

Suicide and Despair

How do you want to die?

Hanging from a rafter with the stool kicked to the floor beneath you? From an overdose of sleeping pills, like an actress or a fed up housewife? Opening your arteries with a razor, in a hot bath so you won't shake so much when the warmth leaves your body?

All at once, in a spatter of brains and bone on the concrete at the foot of the high-rise where you work? Or in increments, installment by installment with cigarettes and saturated fat and air pollution, high blood pressure, radiation, toxins in the water, carcinogenic sugar substitutes and cell phones?

Do you want certainty, a gun to your temple? Or do you play the lottery—driving on the freeway, having unprotected sex, paying taxes to a government that might send you to war or the police to your door with guns in their hands?

Perhaps you're getting paid for it—how much are you worth per hour? Do you wash dishes for minimum wage, give and receive orders for a manager's salary, fight your way to the top to get a fair price for your life?

Or are you buying it? Do you purchase it in single servings, buying yourself a taste whenever you can with alcohol, cocaine, heroine, prostitutes, action movies, video games, television, whatever it takes to go blank for an instant? Do you sometimes long to cut right to the inevitable, flinging yourself into the abyss of some addiction, religion, absolute negation of everything you've ever wanted, everything that has disappointed you?

Do you savor every drop, stretching it out as far as you can? A moderate dose every day for the rest of your life, with health insurance to make sure you don't miss out on a single hour? Or are you ready to get it all over with, consummate the affair with one defiant gesture, flaunting your disdain for the absurd tragedies of this world as you go down in a hail of bullets?

Or maybe it's not death you're after, after all.
But what else is there?

**"I wish all the people who've killed themselves were still alive-
and all the people who are alive would *kill themselves!*"**

If there is a social stratum below the exploited underclass, a demographic that suffers most from the absurdities of our society, it is the suicides. The suicidal class—every minute, more hit the pavement. Who is more dispossessed than them? They are only recognized when they absent themselves; only their blood speaks on their behalf. They know better than anyone else what must change about this world, and yet in despair of ever changing it they avenge themselves upon the only victims in easy reach—giving a new meaning to the saying that those who make half a revolution dig their own graves.

Imagine a person feeling that his life is out of his control to such an extent that he can only regain possession of it by murdering himself! Can a society really be free and healthy if people will go to such lengths to escape?

So like theft and adultery, suicide is forbidden, an unspeakable abomination. Self-satisfied den mothers who have never grappled with debilitating depression feel entitled to sneer at the cowardice of those who make the difficult decision to end their lives. Even the terminally ill are not to choose for themselves when and how they pass away—there are laws against it, as if the living could legislate for those crossing over into death! What does it say of a civilization that it not only forbids its denizens to kill themselves but does not even permit the question of whether life is worth living?

Yet we commit a little suicide every moment we deny ourselves the lives we wish to live. Wholesale suicide is off-limits, but most settle willingly enough for death on the installment plan, whittling their lives away hour by hour. No matter how unfulfilling life is, they dare not back out, for God is waiting on the other side to punish them for shirking their earthly duties—God, that is, or else Public Opinion, which He has deputized in His absence.

Self-Destruction

It is December 17, 2011. One year ago today, Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire in response to his mistreatment by the Tunisian police, setting off a chain reaction worldwide. Let no one forget that the wave of uprisings still sweeping the globe did not simply spring from the hard work of activists, however long some labored to pave the way. It did not begin with people setting out to better themselves or the world. It began with the ultimate gesture of despair and self-destruction.

Bouazizi was not enacting a strategy. He was alone, as alone as a person can be. By drawing back the curtain from injustice so we could come together to fight it, he gave us a precious gift, but a costlier gift than we have any right to receive. The European Parliament awarded him the Sakharov Prize posthumously, but he died knowing only that he had acted on his humiliation and rage, to no end other than to express them. His death hangs in eternity as an irreparable tragedy. We might say the same of so many others who have thrown away their lives in the history of revolutionary struggle.

What can we learn, then, from this man who gave free vegetables to poor families, who had to buy his wares on credit the way many of us must, who reacted against the same policing that imposes inequalities in the US? First, that misery is the same the world over today, even if it assumes different forms. But we can go further: in Bouazizi's example, we see what it takes to get out of here, even if we do not wish to ignite a worldwide conflagration but simply to change our own lives.

What would life be like after a revolution? The dishwasher pictures a dishroom without a boss. The renter imagines herself in the same little hovel, rent-free. The shopper looks forward to stores without checkout counters. We can hardly imagine beyond this horizon—yet surely it would be easier to change everything entirely than to build a version of this world in which the same institutions and habits magically cease to be oppressive. When what we are is intrinsically determined by capitalism, it's not enough to try to better ourselves; we have to cease to be ourselves.



Meanwhile, if a young man joins the military and mindlessly obeys orders that lead to his senseless death, his conduct is courageous and praiseworthy. Suicide, like Disaster, is perfectly acceptable so long as it occurs on the terms of the powers that be; you can die in their hands, but not of your own. The ones who shoot or hang themselves are daring heretics, like the upstart mystics who claim to receive divine guidance that bypasses the Pope: if self-destruction is the order of the day, they're determined to have a firsthand relationship with it, whatever anyone else says. In rejecting both living death and the sovereignty of the authorities over their lives, they are only one step away from rejecting death and domination altogether. Neither death nor taxes!

But again, like theft, adultery, and other pressure valves, suicide is isolating—indeed, it is the most isolating act bar none. While it returns an instant of autonomy to an individual, it can only prevent people from establishing collective ownership of their lives. "Those who dig their own graves make only half a revolution. If no one could steal, if no one could cheat, if no one could end his life, yet all the tensions that run through our society today remained picture the massive upheavals that would ensue!

If all who have killed themselves could compare notes at some grand convention center in the hereafter, what would they be able to tell us? Perhaps they would be capable of succoring one another; where no one else could; perhaps they would regret that, rather than destroying themselves, they didn't launch a revolutionary organization comprised of those who have nothing to lose; perhaps it would seem strange to them that it had felt so much easier to do violence to themselves than to respond to the violence done to them.

It's too late, of course— their lives are fixed in eternity, set apart like flies trapped in amber. But there is still time to find those who are currently contemplating suicide, to encourage them to speak freely about their feelings and do our best to make a world no one will wish to leave.

"Put me out of my misery or take me out of it!"

Life is not simply a trap, a sentence. This occurs to everyone at least once. We have an option that makes us freer than the gods, just as every employee is freer than every boss: we can quit. One can savor this idea in every extremity; it provides consolation when nothing else can. Nothing obligates us to live— therefore, if we have the courage for it, at every moment life can

become a tabula rasa, a space in which anything is possible and everything can be risked.

With such freedom, we can only be slaves if we choose to be. Slavery is for those who still believe that their masters control the domain of death as well as life-- not for us. For us, there is only the unknown. It may be awful, it may be salvation, it may be nothingness, but it is unknowable, in life as well as death. Frontiers to be crossed, new worlds to explore, abysses to be risked-- yes, the possibility of joy, of the realization of your most cherished desires, and risk, risk too. The risk of finally confronting fear, daring the unknown, looking the ugliness of life in the face-off, one way or another, quitting the job of existing.

For most of our contemporaries, life itself is a job, a desperate struggle to juggle a thousand obligations-- including the saddest imperative of all, enjoying oneself. These unfortunates forget the lightness of life, the weightlessness of every moment, every situation, in the face of nonexistence. We can choose not to live. So there is no reason not to open oneself to, to risk everything for, a life of joy. There is always the option of putting an end to things-- one may as well play for high stakes if one chooses to exist. After all, the worst that could happen is already assured.

There is no reason to get up in the morning, then, but to live. No boss, no law, no god can take from you the possibility of saying No.

All this is useless, and not news, to the suicide, who has already disconnected from life and wills death simply to finalize the arrangement, to put an end to the inconvenience of feeling one thing and living another. Once you're that exhausted and demoralized, no mere mental exercise can change your mind; suicide bombers, contrary to idle speculation, must act from a tremendous investment in this world to be capable of going to such lengths to die at others' expense. Your average suicidal person can barely vacuum his apartment, let alone carry out an elaborate mission.

But imagine if people lived as though they might die at any moment, so every day it was as if they were born again! Imagine if no one let life become a job for himself or anyone else in the first place! Then how many people would kill themselves? People commit suicide when it is harder for them to picture breaking off their commitments than ceasing to exist-- here again are our customs and investments, become cancerous and inorganic, riding us to early graves.

Life-Consider the Alternative

If we were brave or reckless enough for it, our despair could afford us supernatural powers. Imagine being able to act without fear of the repercussions, to choose the unknown over the intolerably familiar, to withdraw from unhealthy obligations and relationships the moment you recognize them for what they are. It takes a ruthless mercy to discard sentimentality and remember all the things that never happened and still might never happen, all the dreams that never came true-- to acknowledge that we can't wait forever, there's not enough time for that.

Let the past go. All the old battles you're still fighting, all your denial and defense mechanisms, all the addictions and inertia you've accumulated and all the fears that bind you to them. This is going to be the hardest thing you ever live through-- but let them go, let them die, have courage through the silent moments in the void as you wait, trembling, for your new life to be born. It will be.

Despair. It's our only hope.